*The Tank Closure & Waste Management Environmental Impact Statement

The U.S. Department of Energy (USDOE) is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement for Hanford. It is called the Tank Closure & Waste Management Environmental Impact Statement (TC&WM EIS). It will evaluate options for:

- Choosing supplemental treatment methods for tank wastes.
- Managing and disposing of waste.
- Closing tanks.
- Closing the Fast Flux Test Facility (FFTF).

What is the purpose of an EIS?

The National Environmental Policy Act requires federal agencies to study the environmental impacts of their actions before they proceed. The EIS will evaluate various alternatives, and measures that would eliminate or reduce the likely environmental impacts.

As the owner, or "lead agency," at Hanford, the USDOE must identify and evaluate potential adverse environmental impacts of cleanup. For this EIS, Ecology is a "cooperating agency." As a cooperating agency, we have participated closely with USDOE.

State law (the State Environmental Policy Act or SEPA) requires us to review potential environmental impacts before making permitting decisions. SEPA allows us to adopt a federal study if its quality and content meet SEPA's requirements. We have worked with USDOE on the EIS in the hope of

WHY IT MATTERS

The Tank Closure & Waste Management Environmental Impact Statement will support the decisions for the final cleanup of much of the waste at Hanford – the tank farms, the rest of the waste in the tanks, the cesium and strontium capsules, and the Fast Flux Test Facility.

The Hanford Site, as seen from a satellite.

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ensuring the study's quality and content is good enough for us to adopt, at least in part.

Ecology can use the information in the EIS to minimize impacts through permit conditions, or to deny a proposal if it doesn't address adverse environmental impacts the EIS finds.

Information in the draft EIS will also help the public understand how alternatives for cleanup will affect the environment.

What does the TC&WM EIS cover?

- The final condition of the 177 underground tanks that hold high-level radioactive and dangerous waste.
- The final treatment and disposal of those wastes.
- The final treatment and disposal of the strontium and cesium capsules now stored in a pool at Hanford.
- The final shutdown of the FFTF.
- Onsite disposal alternatives for low-level waste (LLW) and mixed low-level waste (MLLW), from Hanford and other USDOE sites. (Mixed waste has both radioactive and dangerous waste components.)

Hanford's desert.

- Impacts to groundwater that USDOE must update and reanalyze. (The first analysis was in an earlier EIS whose modeling did not stand up to public scrutiny.)
- A cumulative analysis of impacts to the environment site wide.
- Impacts from alternatives for tank farm closure.

The new EIS will evaluate 19 proposals for treating and disposing of the waste in the tanks and capsules and for cleaning and closing the Hanford tank farms. Most of those proposals address combinations of treatment, tank farm closure, and waste disposal.

The EIS will study cumulative impacts from disposing of wastes in the ground at Hanford.

What won't the EIS do?

It does not make the final permit or cleanup decisions such as clean closure, double-shell tank closures, and treatment methods. But we hope its analyses will support those decisions.

The EIS does not serve as a risk assessment (such as ecological, human health, or site-specific) needed for final cleanup decisions. But the EIS could be helpful as a screening tool.

Construction of a double-shell tank farm in 1975. How will all the wastes, then the tanks and related equipment, be treated and disposed of?

What did the public say during scoping?

In 2006, USDOE held a comment period for scoping this EIS. With Ecology, they visited the Tri-Cities, Seattle, Hood River, and Portland. They heard from hundreds of citizens – were you among them?

Here are themes from citizens in the Northwest:

- The EIS should provide the public a comprehensive analysis of all of the existing and potential sources of contamination in an easily understandable way.
- Independent experts should perform the EIS analyses.
- USDOE must complete the Waste Treatment Plant and immobilize the waste now stored in aging underground tanks.
- USDOE should take the time it takes to do a comprehensive and credible study.
- The EIS scope should not include disposal of offsite LLW and MLLW at Hanford.
- The EIS scope should include 100% cleanup of the site, including waste currently buried in existing disposal facilities.
- The EIS scope should not include an alternative for retrieving less than 99% of the tank waste.

What is the cumulative effect of the wastes in the ground already?

Why should the public care?

Information from the EIS will support USDOE's choice of cleanup activities. USDOE will then submit permit applications to conduct the work.

Also, if the EIS is not robust enough, Ecology will not adopt it. We would then have to prepare another EIS, which could delay cleanup.

When USDOE has completed the draft TC&WM EIS, they will hold a comment period. This is your opportunity to tell USDOE and Ecology your concerns about the draft. USDOE must respond to all comments and include them in the final TC&WM EIS.

We are very interested in your comments and concerns in this important area of cleanup.

Hanford's cleanup must protect the Columbia River.

Do you think the TC&WM EIS considers the right alternatives and impacts? Are USDOE's preferred alternatives (the ones they want to follow) based on sound science? Valid assumptions? Consideration of cost and benefits? Are the right mitigation measures planned?

You may not agree with USDOE or Ecology, and we need to know that. We will look at whether the TC&WM EIS meets the state laws, and you may look at whether your values are met as well.